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S THOUGHT IS LED

SONNETS AND LYRICS

ALICIA RAVAK HIREN

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LOS ANGELES

To dear Jean Evans - with the warmest appreciation of her interest.

Maria L. Van Kirk

September 1912.

Presentation Copy

AS THOUGHT IS LED

As Thought Is Led

LYRICS AND SONNETS

BY

ALICIA K. VAN BUREN

BOSTON
RICHARD G. BADGER
The Gorham Press
1904

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Printed at
THE GORHAM PRESS
Boston, U. S. A.

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AS THOUGHT IS LED

A dewy morning with unclouded skies!
Nothing I crave the kindly earth denies.
Above, below, around, in all I see,
A sense of beauty breathes. The old beech tree
Is gently swaying in the breeze, and low
And soft its leaves are whispering as though
They feared to break my rest with too much sound—
Their shadows too seem whispering on the ground.
The birds have ceased to sing and all is still
As slumberland may be, and down the hill,
Though glancing right and left, naught holds my eye
Save one slow-flitting white-winged butterfly.
Quite idly do I watch it as it speeds,
Now here, now there, as though each flower it needs
Must try—the iron weed, the golden-rod,
And milk-weed with its bursting silky pod.
Then down the hill it flies, at last to light
For one brief moment on the little gate.
Thou little gate! perhaps this very night
Thou 'lt open wide for one—dear love!—I wait.

THE NEIGHBORING FIRESIDES

A happy man and woman sat beside
  Their fire. Between them was a small chest filled
  With garments soft and white; and gladness thrilled
Their hearts as piece by piece they fondly eyed
Each dainty thing, for each but served to guide
  Their thoughts to one whose coming needs must build
  New chambers in their house of love, and gild
Their lives with self-forgetting joy and pride.

Alone and poor, beside another fire,
  Another sat. Her thoughts were those that stir
    The soul to everlasting griefs and wild
Despair—death was her eager one desire.
  And soon death came, but not, alas, for her.
    He took the happy mother and her child.

LONGING

O great-souled makers of immortal songs,
  I love you well. To you what peace I owe!
    How many griefs of mine have you allayed!
And yet to-day my eager spirit longs
  To utter its own cry of joy or woe
    In some small song that I myself have made.

And so, you master singers, great and good,
  You fail me now. Though oft in you I've found
    Relief, to-day you leave me sad and lone,
And like to one who, craving motherhood,
  And seeing many childish faces round,
    Enjoys them not—through longing for her
      own.

CHEROKEE ROSES

Before my door are roses everywhere,
  But none O Cherokee! are fair as thine.
  So thick upon thy breast the white blooms shine
They seem but one great snowy blossom rare;
And yet, two months ago, as I stood there
  Beneath the fir round which thy tendrils twine,
  I dreamed not that thy leafless straggling vine
Would some day all this vestal beauty wear.

And thou, my friend, who seemed so commonplace
  When first I looked into thy clear true eyes,
Thou too didst own an unseen inner grace
  Which, even more than beauty, beautifies.
I never dreamed thy kindly rugged face
  Could ever look so good and brave and wise.

THE WORLD IS STRANGE

The world is strange: below the hill
  I hear an unknown call;
One cry, and then the air is still
  Again—and that is all.

A stroller walks along the road,
  A horseman gallops by:
I know them not, nor their abode,
  Nor where they go, nor why.

This once, perhaps, they cross my days
  And never any more;
And they and I go separate ways,
  The ways we went before.

They touch my life this once, and bring
  So very little change,
It seems a sad unmeaning thing.
  Ah me, the world is strange!

LOVE'S INCONSISTENCY

One day when thou wert ill and spent with pain,
I sat beside thy crib and tried in vain
To make thee sleep. When murmured lullabies
And soothing touch at last had closed thine eyes,
I scarcely stirred, all fearful lest I make
A sound, and thou to suffering should'st wake.

Again, my darling child, art thou asleep.
All day, beside thy little grave, I weep.
From pain and sorrow ever art thou free;
And yet—Oh, how I long to waken thee!

REPRESSION

Of much repression be not vain,
  Nor think it always best:
Those feelings causing needless pain
  Are better unexpressed;
But if we may, to some pale cheek,
  A smile by kind words win,
And we those words refuse to speak,
  Then is repression sin.

THE SEED

God sows the selfsame truth in every heart—
A seed from which at birth a plant doth start;
But every plant a different blossom shows
According to the soil wherein it grows.

Condemn no creed! Dig deep beneath the sod
And at the root thou'lt find the truth of God.

TO-DAY AND TOMORROW

To-day we pray for death,
  Tomorrow pray for life,
And almost every breath
  Is drawn in strife.
If death came when we willed
No grave would be unfilled;
If life came when we prayed
  No grave be made.

THE ONLY WAY

I lost my way when in the woods one night
  And took a path I ne'er before had known.
  A storm was threatening, and it had grown
Quite dark, and moon and stars were hid from sight.
Then round my heart a numbing sense of fright
  Pressed hard—I seemed so utterly alone!
  Till through the gloom a flash of lightning shone
And I beheld the *homeward* path aright.

And so, dear love, whenever pain or care
  Or disappointment darken any day;
When hope is almost vanquished by despair,
  And every thought is wandering astray,
One word from thee will brighten all the air
  And lead my feet along the *loveward* way.

RECONCILED

We sometimes grudge the hours of rest,
  Our minds too feverish for sleep;
And toss upon our beds, distressed
  That we the daytime may not keep.

There are so many things to do,
  So many things must still be seen,
And day's swift moments are too few
  For idle night to intervene.

But slowly, now, through every limb
  There creeps a grateful weariness,
And gradually the mind grows dim,
  The heavy eyelids downward press.

How sweet the dreamland where we go,
  The long night that before us lies!
Ah! welcome Death! If only so
  Thy cool soft fingers close mine eyes!

HYPNOSIS

I love the little, swift, tempestuous brook,
  Whose bubbling waters, cool and fresh and sweet,
  Invite the thirsty wanderer's weary feet
To where the tall trees make a shady nook.

I love to lie there in the pleasant shade
  And watch the changing waters glide and gleam,
  Until the living world becomes a dream,
And I myself into a dream am made.

DEFERRED

Each day I 've worn a smile to hide
  Suspense and pain thine absence made,
Till now my smiles have slowly died,
  As garments too long used must fade.

And though thou 'rt come again and brought
  Relief from all those haunting fears,
To tell the joy I feel I 've naught,
  O dearest one, but sobs and tears.

PROMPTINGS

For me the sunbeams glance and glow,
  And soft winds breathe. On me all day
The thriftless happy birds bestow
  Their lavish carols, blithe and gay.
For me with fresher beauty bloom
The flowers, and shed their faint perfume.

So sweet are night, noon, eve and morn,
  My happy heart is like to break
If from its joy there be not born
  A tender love for thy dear sake.
As nature showers her gifts on me
So let me shower my love on thee.

UNCONSCIOUS WORTH

To L. D. S.

The sun one day looked down upon the earth
  And filled it with a light so gold and rare,
  Each living thing awoke and all the air
Grew musical with sweet content and mirth;
And forest trees and tiny plants gave birth
  To tender leaves and fragrant blossoms fair.
  But though the sun shed beauty everywhere
'T was all unmindful of its own great worth.

So thou, dear one, unconscious of thy power,
  Called forth the good that lay within each heart;
    And oft thy gentle spirit's kindly rays—
Like sunshine falling on the night-chilled flower—
  Have made love bloom and tender impulse start
    When life seemed dark through all its hopeless days.

MOTHER MARY

The Mother Mary sat beside
  The manger, rough and bare,
And watched with happiness and pride
  The infant sleeping there.

All memory of her pain was past;
  A new joy had begun.
Her mother-love would fain forecast
  The glory of her son:—

Her son who was to be a king!
  A king with wealth and power.
She knew not that the years would bring
  That last dark awful hour.

Like Mary every mother turns
  Her eager tender eyes
Upon her own dear child and yearns
  That he to fame may rise.

But, oh, if she perchance could see
  The hatred and the scorn,
The long-borne bitter agony,
  The hero's crown of thorn!

REST

With full content my tranquil heart is blessed
  As underneath the peaceful trees I lie.
  Sweet lulling sounds—the wind's low rhythmic
    sigh,
The bird's glad singing, clear and unrepressed,
The anxious hum of bees as fearful lest
  They miss one flower—like some soft lullaby
  Have filled my soul with peace; and ear and eye
And heart and mind are gently soothed to rest.

Dear love, my days were long and sad till thou
  Didst make the world seem fair. But well I
    know
That those remembered griefs, which once did bow
  My soul, this happy restfulness bestow.
In truth, how could I feel this gladness now
  Had I not known the bitterness of woe?

THE BEECH TREE

The solitary beech stands dark and bare
  Against the winter sky. Rough winds have torn
  Its leaves away; and now it seems to mourn
The cruel loss of all that made it fair.
When clothed in its full green 't was wont to share
  Its sheltered peace; birds' fragile nests were borne
  Amid its leafy boughs, and many a worn
Sad soul beneath its shade dismissed his care.

My loveless life once seemed thus bare and stern
  Till fresh, unhoped-for hopes changed every part:
For now I love and know love's sweet return,
  And now I feel life's quickening influence start
Like leaves in spring; and every day I yearn
  To shed my gladness o'er some other heart.

UNCHANGED

Once more beside thy shore I stand,
  My own St. Johns,
And every tree through all the land—
  Like one who dons
His richest garb wherein to greet
  The honored guest—
In bright array and fragrance sweet
  Is newly dressed.
Though newly dressed the selfsame trees
  I knew last spring—
Through whose green boughs the selfsame breeze
  Is whispering—
Are here again to welcome me:
  The slender pine,
The moss-hung china-berry tree,
  The jasmine vine
That twines about the old dead fir,
  The orange bloom
That scents the air when soft winds stir
  Its faint perfume,
The Spanish-bayonet whose crown
  Too heavy weighs,
The pampas-grass, now dry and brown,
  That idly sways;—
They all are now just as before
  Through many and many a year;
And some day I shall come no more,
  But they will still be here.

A MEMORY

To L. K. F.

It is the fairest of October days;
Upon the hills the trees are all ablaze
With red, red-brown and gold; and left and right
The valley fields are bathed in purple light.

The air is filled with Autumn's witching sound:
The gentle fall of beechnuts on the ground;
The sharp repeated raps the woodpeckers beat;
The rustle of the grass beneath my feet;

And, merged in one deep rhythmic monotone,
The hum of bees, the insects' ceaseless drone,
The far-off songs of birds, and in the leaves
The wind's low sigh, like one who loves and grieves.

How soft the breeze! it hardly stirs my hair.
How warm the sun! the mantle that I wear
Is thrown aside. Ah me! the earth is clad
In bright unwonted charm—but I am sad.

For on a day like this you came to me
Last fall. We stood beneath this very tree.
I see you still and hear each word you said,
But now I stand alone—and you are dead.

HEREAFTER

Should'st thou still live, belovèd, and I die,
  I pray that hopeless sorrow may not press
  Too long and heavily. In thy distress,
Let not thy grief-enshrouded heart deny
The words of solace that may soothe its sigh.
  Draw not apart from those whose tenderness
  And sympathy would make thy sorrow less,
But strive to see earth's joys with undimmed eye.

And some day thou shalt hear a voice and see
  A smile reminding thee, perchance, of mine;
    And from that voice and smile a love may grow
Again within thy heart. God grant that she
  Who calls it forth may make thy pathway shine
    With joy as great as thou hast made me know.

INSPIRATION

Have you not heard the harsh unpleasant tone
  That hands unskilled draw from the violin?
  Instead of those sweet strains they strive to win
There comes a cry or rough discordant moan;
But when one plays to whom the strings are known,
  A gentle touch will seem to wake within
  Its breast a soul to his own soul akin,
Till sound and feeling into one are grown.

Thus, long ago, 't was your dear self who woke
  My slumbering heart to life and love. To none
Had it responded rightly till you spoke;
  And then life's subtle music was begun,
For love had claimed its own and at one stroke
  Had made thy soul and mine to merge in one.

EUTHANASIA

In that sweet hour before the end of day,
Just as the sun in silence steals away,
It shcds upon the sky and sea and shore
A radiant light they never knew before.

And so 't is said that ere the spirit goes
At end of life, the wearied body knows
A brief and new-born ease and strength, the while
The lines of pain become a peaceful smile.

TELEPATHY

There are wise men, I know, who teach
  That souls—though far apart—
With kindred souls may hold some speech.

To-night, although my lips are dumb,
  I call with all my heart;
Then why, dear love, do you not come?

AN IMPRESSION

Inquiring, wistful eyes that hope somewhere
  To find new happiness, yet fearful lest
  Another sadness rise. A brow distressed
With thinking oft of days too full of care,
And marked by cruel lines—but still how fair!
  Wide nostrils that deep breathings of unrest
  Have fashioned so, and pallid lips compressed
To check a moan—of what unknown despair?

I know not what upon that face has wrought
  Such grievous marks; but, underneath its gloom,
I see the dormant powers of joy, which naught
  But love itself can waken and illume.
O would, sweet piteous face, I had the might
To drive away thy gloom and bring the light!

To M. L. K.

In vain I seek for fitting terms, my dear,
  Wherewith to tell you all the love I feel.
  Alas, the blundering words do but conceal
The heart's intent. I am like those who hear
The mind's ethereal music, sweet and clear,
  And yet whose fingers, lacking skill or ease,
  Bring naught but painful discords from the
    keys.

ACTION

Beneath the hill there runs a spring
  Whose cooling waters oft give cheer
  To some poor stranger drawing near
To rest him from his wandering.

The ceaseless flowing of the stream
  Doth keep its waters clear and cool;
  'T would soon become a stagnant pool
Were it to pause to drone and dream.

So he who spends his every hour
  To dream and feel and not to do,
  Must needs lose force and stagnate too:
In naught but action is there power.

WHEN TO COME BACK

My loved ones sat with me outside our door
Last eve. All bright and calm the river lay,
Save when some leaping fish with sudden splash
Made wide dark ripples on the smooth expanse.
The faint breeze scarcely stirred the tiny isles
Of hyacinth that floated with the tide,
Nor seemed to move the sail-boats, far away,
Of weary fishermen returning home.
Above the long dark line of oaks and pines
That marks the farther shore, the sky was tinged
With purple hues and pink. One star alone
Through misty clouds shone dimly overhead.
So peaceful and so silent earth and sky
And river were, that we grew silent too,
Submitting heart and mind to nature's mood.

From out the dreamy realm of formless thought
Rose memories of you, dear love; not those
That fill the heart with pain, but only such
As make its sadness sweet. Then all at once
A mocking-bird close by began to sing.
My soul, I think, was surely never thrilled
By lovelier music. And whilst thus it sang
Through all my being rushed the sudden thought—
I know not why—that you yourself were near.

The old belief was sweet to me, dear one,
That you were far away from us, at rest
Within a happier world. But if in truth
You can, as some report, come back at times
To those you love, and share in part their lives,
O come I pray but as you came last night,
Come when our minds are full of tranquil thoughts,
And peace environs us and all our world.

BECAUSE I LOVE YOU SO

Because I love you so my glad heart thrilled
  When you confessed your love. What longings lay
  Within my soul to make your life a day
Of happiness. My every thought was filled
With eager hope that I might grow more skilled
  Each hour to shed new light upon your way,
  Withholding naught that pleasure might convey—
E'en yielding life itself, if you so willed.

Alas, I 've learned such anxious love doth bring
  Its sadness too. For oft I yearn to find
Approving looks: uneasy fears upspring
  When I perceive them not, and words unkind,
Perhaps, I say; and then I grieve to know
You 've turned away—because I love you so.

MOTHER AND CHILD

My child! How yearns my heart o'er thee, as pressed
To its quick throbs thy fragile form doth lie.
Wert thou not mine thy helplessness would cry
For sympathy; but in thy mother's breast
What fears for thee! With each new life unrest,
I know, is born, and ere distress draw nigh
To thee I long, dear child, to learn how I
May check its coming or may guard thee best.

I would that thou could'st have my nature o'er,
That all thy childish griefs I might divine,
And make each bliss, that I once longed for, thine;
But if thy soul be one I ne'er before
Have known, God grant I love thee all the more,
For thou may'st have a greater soul than mine.

THESE APRIL DAYS

These April days, ah, who can say
  Just what the weather has in store?
  This morning, when with steady pour
The rain beat down, and skies were gray,
Ah, who could guess the sun's bright ray
  Would beam before the day was o'er?
These April days, ah, who can say
  Just what the weather has in store?

My love is sweet as an April day,
And though no welcome smile she wore
  When last we met, I 'll try once more—
This time perhaps she 'll bid me stay.
These April days, ah, who can say
  Just what the weather has in store?

THE MOON-BEAM BRIDGE

O golden moon, as thou dost slowly rise
  Above the beautiful St. Johns, how fair
  Thou art to one who is oppressed by care
And looks at thee through longing tear-dimmed eyes.
A bridge of gold across the water lies;
  From thee it stretches firm and smooth to where
  I stand. O would that I might cross, and share
With thee the glories of thy Paradise!

And yet, dear moon, if thou should'st let me in,
  I might not feel the happiness, nor see
The light and beauty, that I hoped to win.
  Perhaps upon this earth I 'd yearn to be,
For it, 't is said, though full of pain and sin,
  Is still than thou more fair, when seen from thee.

THE OLD SCHOOL-HOUSE

We started out to find the old school-house,
The oldest house in Orange Park. At last,
With limbs that ached from walking through the
sand,
We reached the broken gate; and up the path,
All overgrown with brambles, briers and weeds,
We slowly went until we reached the porch.
All rotted and unsafe we found the floor;
And fallen limbs from overhanging trees
Had broken through the porch's rotten roof.
The roof itself was green with moss and ferns.
The doors were gone; the house stood open, free
To wanderers tame and wild, to man and beast.
The sun poured through the windows' broken panes
On fallen plaster littering floor and stairs.
The straight high mantel-piece that framed the
wide
Old-fashioned hearth, alone stood firm and dark—
With strange suggestions of an old-time cheer.
Beyond the doorway, in the rear, there spread
Long level stretches of the stately pines,
Of burly live-oaks, gray with hanging moss,
Of bayonetted palms and red-brown fields
Of wiry grass. The old coquina steps,
Beneath the doorway's sill, lay overturned—
Grim monuments of long-departed days.

A chill depression pained my heart and grew
More strong as, one by one, there stood revealed
The signs of desolation and decay.
And so at last we left the bleak old house;
But could not leave, alas, the heavy weight
Of saddened thought; for in our minds still clung
The images it had evoked.
But soon
A winding in the shady road disclosed
A gleam of light—the beautiful St. Johns.
All suddenly it broke upon the sight,
With miles of water open to the sky
And flashing back the splendor of the sun.
It seemed a symbol of eternal years!
Just so it must have looked in that far time
When Indian fishers in their light canoes
Or Spanish voyagers in high-prowed ships
Moved up and down its shores.
Our hearts grew light;
We lost the pain man's handiwork had wrought
And felt the peace unchanging nature gives.

NOTE: The school-house above-mentioned was situated on the plantation where Harriet Beecher Stowe first resided in Florida. It was recently burnt to the ground.

FADING FLOWERS

Last month the jasmine was in bloom:
  Each blossom, like a golden star,
  Gleamed in the light, and shed afar
Its sweet and delicate perfume.

Though jasmine-buds no more delight
  The eye, before me now I see,
  Upon the climbing Cherokee,
A hundred roses, snowy-white.

And soon the great magnolia trees
  Among their glossy leaves will bear
  The white and massy blooms that share
Their heavy odors with the breeze.

And so, through all the burgeoning year,
  The various flowers shall bloom and fade.
  Oh why was all this beauty made
When it so soon must disappear?

IN FLORIDA

In Florida now shines the sun of spring;
And there the roses bloom, the glad birds sing;
  And there, before my door, the river lies,
  Its bosom glowing in the sunset skies
Or in the morning sunlight glimmering.

The breezes stir the wreaths of moss that swing
From live-oak boughs; and from the tall pines fling
  The brown cones down; and sweet the odors rise
    In Florida.

O birds and flowers and trees, around you cling
What tender memories! My thoughts now wing
  Themselves to you. Where nothing greets the eyes
  Save snow and leafless trees, the chilled heart sighs
For all the light and life the days now bring
    In Florida.

NOVEMBER

To stay in doors to-day were best,
For nature seems to be oppressed
With melancholy and unrest.

The sun has ceased to shine. The air
Is filled with leaves the rough winds tear
From off the trees—now almost bare.

Poor trees! how strange and weak you seem
Without your leaves. Ah, who would dream
You once controlled the sun's fierce beam.

The chilly winds rush by with low
Sad moans. Perhaps, dear trees, they know—
And grieve that they must leave you so.

A flock of black-birds draws in sight;
Their chattering cry is shrill with fright
Lest evil overtake their flight.

My own mood, too, is such that less
Than nature's mourning and distress
Would fill my soul with heaviness.

So I will close the door, and here,
Beside the log's fresh-kindled cheer,
Will warm my heart and banish fear.

MY VIOLIN

My violin, with tender, loving care,
Is resting near my heart. It seems to share
  Each quickened throb, and as I draw the bow
  Across the trembling strings, they seem to know
My inmost heart and what lies hidden there:

My heart through which, (though life seems wholly fair),
There thrills a sadness like some deep despair,
  Which I would fain conceal, but needs must show
    My violin.

I touch the strings; before I am aware
They learn my grief, and sad notes fill the air;
  In melody that seems to overflow
  With tearful tones, they utter all my woe.
Ah, is it kind with anguish thus to tear
    My violin?

SPRING

The Spring has come, and everywhere
The flowers have bloomed, and trees long bare
Have put forth leaves, and birds long still
With raptured notes the woodlands fill.

O would that thou to me could'st bring
Such bloom and joy as these, dear Spring;
That thou could'st make me also long
To lift my voice once more in song.

MEMORY

The dear remembered days—they are not dead!
  The soul transcends the momentary thought.
In memory the Past and Present wed,
  And each without its other sinks to naught.

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